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ABSTRACT

Human beings are shaped by their cultural and natural environment, yet there is no systematic in-depth inquiry into world cultures at any given level in the social studies grade spectrum. This article attempts to collect and collate the scattered notions about different cultures and places to which students are exposed from about grade 6 onward with a view to providing textual reference material that will be useful to students and teachers alike. A cultural region is primarily created by humans as they meet human needs. Cultural landscape is defined from the standpoint of human impact on the environment and is not independent of the natural environment; rather, it reflects ways in which a group of people choose to use the natural environment. Different environments offer different ranges of use possibilities for sustaining life. Humans' use of the environment usually requires the use of tools or technology. Social organization occurs so people can manage the environment, and exist with one another, divide the work, and reduce conflict. Charts, student activities and a checklist of terms for review and discussion are included in the article to clarify the concepts to be taught. (SM)

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Understanding Culture and Place

Paul F. Thomas

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A note to teachers:
The teaching of *world cultures* makes its official appearance in social studies curricula from about Grade 6 onward. This formal entry has already been unofficially anticipated in the primary division, where many teachers have their pupils explore "Christmas Around the World" or "Neighbors from Other Lands." It is thus that many pupils are first exposed to the idea of different *cultures* and *places*. These overarching concepts themselves contain a universe of meaning sampled by bits and pieces throughout the entire social studies grade-spectrum without the benefit of a systematic, in-depth inquiry at any given level.

This article attempts to collect and collate such scattered notions—under one roof, as it were—with a view to providing textual reference material that will be useful for students and teachers alike. The reading-level is about Grade 9 except for the technical terms, which are defined in context. A checklist of important terms is given at the end of the article. Enterprising teachers would be able to tailor this material to classes at various levels according to their needs or inclinations.

If some of the ideas presented strike a note of urgency, then I have succeeded in my *intention of heightening awareness of culture and place before both are obliterated* by the doomsday scenario that many of us, through inadvertence, have been writing for ourselves.

To understand world cultures, we need to obtain a clear idea of *culture* and its elements. The world is so vast and complex that we need to divide it into more manageable portions called *regions*. Let us first consider the general nature of regions and their characteristics, then examine the nature of culture.

UNDERSTANDING REGIONS AND THE QUALITY OF PLACE

A region is an area of the earth's surface that is more or less uniform in one or more ways *so as to distinguish it* from surrounding areas. For example, the *Prairies* of Western Canada are quite distinct from the *Canadian Shield*. Some of the different types of regions are indicated in Figure 1, Classifying Regions.

Figure 1

CLASSIFYING REGIONS

TYPE OF REGION	CHARACTERISTICS	EXAMPLES
Single-factor region	More or less uniform in only one respect.	Most countries (*political regions*).
		The only common feature may be the fact of being under one national government; e.g., *Canada* is that territory governed by a parliament in Ottawa.
		The Soviet Union is that area ruled by a government located at Moscow.
Multi-factor region	Tends to be uniform in two or more respects.	The *Amazon Basin* is distinctive in climate, soils, vegetation.
Natural region	Multi-factor region having characteristics determined by nature.	*Amazon Basin, Sahara Desert, Canadian Arctic, Congo Basin.*

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CLASSIFYING REGIONS (continued)

TYPE OF REGION	CHARACTERISTICS	EXAMPLES
Cultural region (Cultural realm) (Cultural world)	Multi-factor region mainly based on human factors (causes determined by people)	*Latin America*—that part of the Americas under the influence of the Latin-derived tongues of Spanish and Portugese, the Roman Catholic (Latin) Church, and historic traditions of Latin education, the feudal system and other customs. *Chinatown* (of any large North American city such as New York) has a distinct ethnic, commercial urban flavor.
Geographic region	Multi-factor region determined by both natural and human factors.	*Kwanto Plain, Japan*—an urban zone (Tokyo) created by people, falls within a flat plain having a distinctive climate. *Andean Altiplano*—a high, treeless, dry plateau is the home of a distinct culture of highland Indians who live by herding llamas and alpacas.

Observe how the different kinds of regions fit within one another. The *usefulness* of this arrangement can be seen if we consider the idea of *address*. A letter mailed to a friend in town need only indicate name, house number, street, and district. But house, street, and district are already *sub-regions* that fit within one another. If someone in another galaxy in the universe wanted to send the letter, the address would need to be more detailed. The address given backward, as in the example might make for speedier contact:

Galaxy 40321
Solar System 7931
Planet Earth
Western Hemisphere (Culture World of the Americas)
North America (Culture Realm)
Canada (Culture Region)
Atlantic Canada (Geographic Region)
Nova Scotia (Political Sub-Region)
Halifax (Urban Region)
145 Ragweed Avenue
Babbling Brooks School
Room 14
Desk #2, Row 5
Raymond Adams
} (Focal Regions)

Yes, even a person is a mobile region interacting with others. And even the region of the person can be subdivided into organ-systems, tissues, cells, molecules, and so forth, all of which go about their business at their own *scale* of activity. These mobile units make up a *culture*. Just as a group of blood cells make up a blood culture, a group of individuals make a *society*, or one aspect of culture.

Returning for a moment to Raymond Adams's address, we can see that the smaller the region, the more things we can say are true of the region as a whole. For the Americas, a culture world, there are very few unifying elements. One element is "westness"; another is the fact of discovery and settlement by Europeans after A.D. 1492. Certainly the climate, landscape, vegetation, people, and so forth have no uniformity. But at the *scale* of the imaginary West Coast fishing hamlet of Frog's Landing, we can specify uniformities in climate, land forms, type of people, their means of livelihood, and so forth.

Culture worlds and *culture realms* are really *superregions* that cut across latitudes, climates, physical features, inhabitants, and activities. They do possess artificial or cultural unifying characteristics, as we see for the Latin American realm in Figure 1.

Cultural regions tend to be *political regions*, which have additional unifying characteristics: a common national government, legal system, currency, and, usually, predominant language and racial stock. Some uniform environmental characteristics may exist as well. For example, *Japan* possesses *insularity* (islands surrounded by water).

The culture worlds of this planet, along with some representative culture realm and cultural regions, are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

CULTURE WORLDS, REALMS, and REGIONS

Cultural world	Cultural realms	REPRESENTATIVE Cultural regions
The Americas	Anglo-America Latin America	Canada Peru
Oriental	East Asia	China Japan
Dry world	Middle East	Saudi Arabia
Subsaharan Africa	West Africa	Ghana
Pacific	Australo-Pacific Southeast Asia	New Zealand Malaysia
European	West Europe	France
Polar	Soviet Union	Ukraine

Figure 3 shows the spatial make up of the culture world of the Americas.

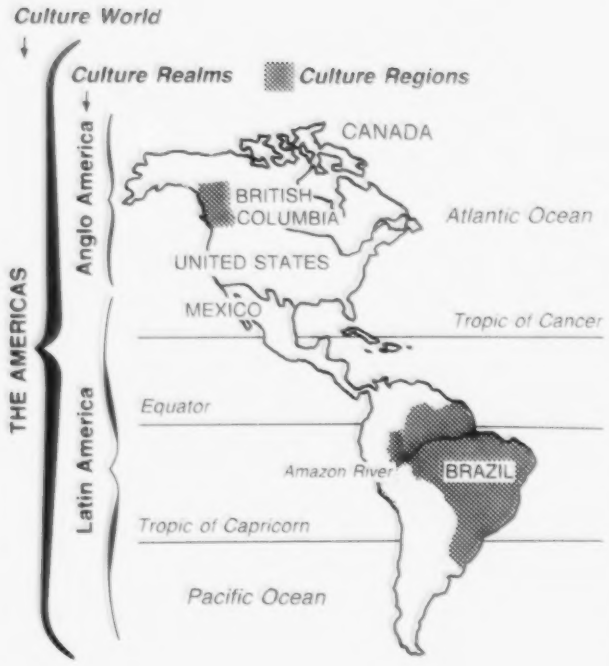


Figure 3

Culture World of the Americas and some of its subdivisions

The names given to the larger super-regions vary from one authority to another. This is not surprising, since regions tend to overlap at their edges. The Soviet Union, for example, really has one foot in each of the European and Polar culture worlds. Regions, like people, are unique. No one region is quite the same as any other. Like people, they have some common characteristics, the most important of which are summarized in Figure 4.

Figure 4

SOME PROPERTIES OF REGIONS

—Regions can be any size, from the 2.5 Km^2 of the Vatican to the area of a continent, or indeed the world (the world-region).

—The larger the number of factors considered, the smaller the region must become. The fewer factors considered, the greater the chance that they operate over a large area.

—Multi-factor regions may be known by more than one name.

—Large single-factor regions can usually be broken into smaller multi-factor regions.

—Humans must be in the picture before we can speak of *cultural* and *geographical regions*.

—Different regions interact with one another, mainly through human beings—by way of trade, travel, migration, war, and so forth.

—A region cannot be controlled or managed unless a boundary can be drawn around it that will prevent conflict with other regions. Natural boundaries (such as mountains) are better for that purpose than is an artificial boundary like that separating Poland from U.S.S.R. Even in Canada, some provinces and the federal government cannot agree as to whose boundary extends over certain natural resources.

—Political regions that also happen to be natural and geographical regions tend to be more stable or unified than political regions that do not make geographical sense.

—Regions change over time. Natural regions change slowly. Cultural regions change more quickly. Nations come and go. Political boundaries are moved. Natural environments are changed by human beings, usually for the worse; for example, as forests are cut down, and rivers are dammed.

—A region fits into larger regions, but can itself be broken into subregions.

—The idea of region is a product of human culture.

—Regions differ in character or personality (just as people do) not just in size, and they are said to have *regional flavor*. This flavor is most evident at the core or heart of a region rather than at its edges. Thus, Paris, being centrally located, is more typical of France than are any of its seaports.

—Except for political regions, the boundaries between regions are *zones* of *transition* (where conditions are mixed), rather than lines.

CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. What is a region?
2. Why is it useful to speak of regions in studying the world?
3. What kind of regions are the following? (Some may be more than one type.)
   a. Canada
   b. British Columbia
   c. the Canadian Shield
   d. the Congo (Zaire) Basin
   e. the American Manufacturing Beet
   f. East Germany

Give reasons for your answers.

4. Using your atlas and the information in this article, see if you can discover the unifying characteristics for any five of the regions, realms, and worlds given in Figure 2.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL REGIONS

Natural regions, as will be recalled from Figure 1, are more or less uniform in natural factors; the interaction of the physical factors of climate, vegetation, and soils. Terrain and geology may also be involved. Natural influences set the stage for human activity. The most important natural influence is climate. A full discussion of the interaction of these factors, and the consequences for humankind, has been given elsewhere (see Thomas, 1981, 1982a, 1982b). Because students find it easier to deal with *effects before causes* (the what before why principle), natural regions are usually named after their *vegetation* (a *visible* synthesis of natural forces) rather than after climate, which is a less tangible abstraction. A summary of some useful natural relationships appears in Figures 5 and 6.

Natural regions are really different habitats, or living quarters, for humans providing different *possibilities* for meeting basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter. We will return to environmental possibilities after we examine *culture* and its elements.

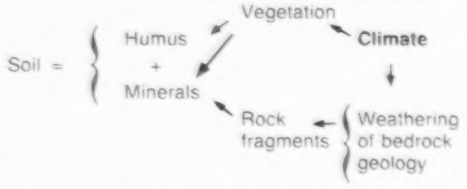
HOW CLIMATE (Moisture and Temperature) AFFECTS VEGETATION & SOILS

About 85% of the substance of vegetation (*Biomass*) is water. The lusher the vegetation, the greater the rainfall needed. For that reason, rainforest—the lushest vegetation of all—needs the most precipitation.

Temperature is also important. Plant seeds will not generally germinate if temperatures are below 43°F (6°C). One or more months that have a temperature of at least 50°F (10°C) are a precondition for tree growth, which also requires at least 20"-25" (51-64 mm) of precipitation in temperate climates.

Soil has an important influence on the food-producing possibilities available to humankind. *Soil* results from the decay of vegetation, which puts soil *nutrients*, namely *humus* and some minerals, into the earth. As can be seen from the sketch below, climate is the key to soil as well as vegetation.

Composition and origin of soil



Rainfall washes soil nutrients down into deeper layers of the earth, leaving the top layers less fertile. The process is called *leaching*. Leaching is habitual only where there is enough rain for trees to grow.

Some other points for you to know about soils follow:

- The leading soil nutrient removed by leaching is lime (calcium).
- Low rainfall results in high-lime but low-humus soils (because there is not much vegetation to produce humus). Such soils are very fertile under irrigation.
- Hot, wet climates produce the most vegetation and therefore the most humus. But the most leaching takes place, so humus disappears as quickly as it is produced.
- The best soils have a balance of humus and minerals; for example, the grassland soils of the prairie regions also known as *chernozems* (The Russian word for *blackearths*).
- Although chernozems are among the best soils in the world, rainfall may not be as reliable for crops, as is the case in the slightly leached soil zones.
- Leaves of deciduous trees produce more humus than do the needles of coniferous trees, which also inhibit earthworm activity in soil formation.

Figure 5

Figure 6A

The Effect of Decreasing Latitude and Increasing Moisture Supply on Vegetation and Soils

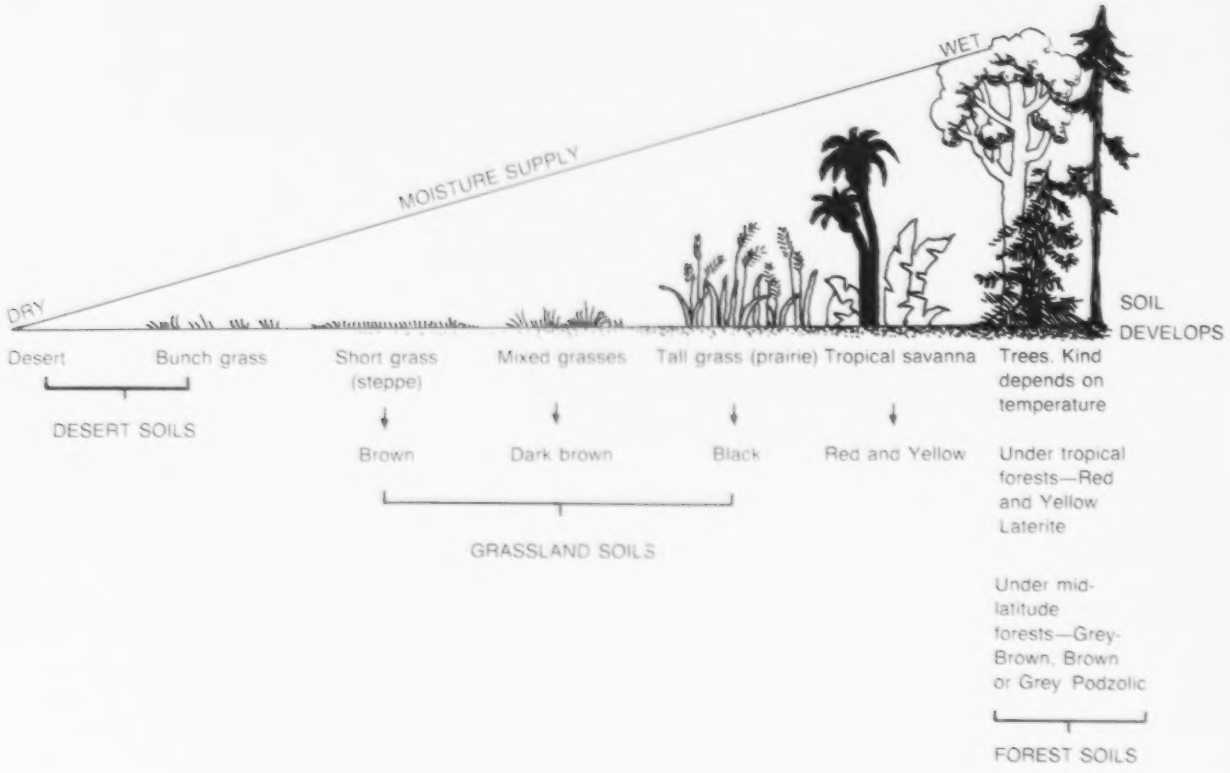
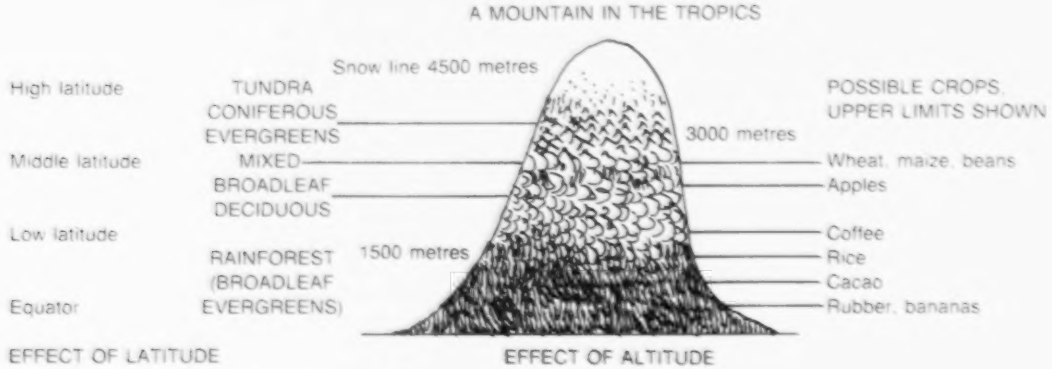


Figure 6B

An Increase in Altitude Resembles an Increase in Latitude as Far as Vegetation and Agricultural Possibilities Are Concerned



UNDERSTANDING CULTURE AND ITS ELEMENTS

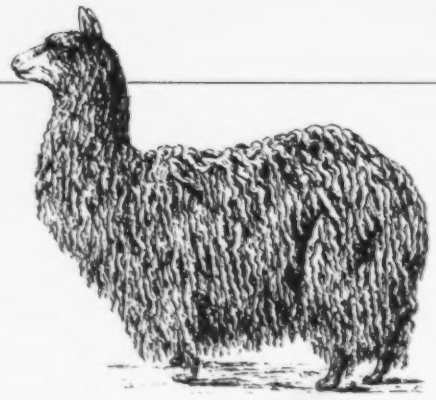
What distinguishes human beings from other living creatures? Let us explore some possibilities, as in the chart, Figure 7, below.

Figure 7

What Makes One Uniquely Human?

The ability	Distinguishing factor?	Reason/Evidence
to think and solve problems	No	Rats can find cheese in a maze better than people can.
to make tools	No	Monkeys can improvise tools to obtain food.
to communicate	No	Dogs bark to protect their turf. Dolphins and whales communicate by signals.
to dream (have sleeping pictures)	No	Birds and mammals have dreams.
to dance	No	Many animals have courting rituals.
to form a society	No	Bees can create a society.
to overcome environmental limitations	No	Birds fly south in winter.
to know that death will someday end one's life	Yes	
to create religion (to seek meaning for one's life and death)	Yes	The human being is uniquely the religious animal.
to respond to symbols	No	Dogs and monkeys can be trained to obtain food by responding to sound and visual cues.
to *create* non-sensory (abstract) symbols to create new meanings	Yes	Many animals such as wolves can *mark* off their turf with a scent to keep real rivals away. A witch-doctor, however, could make *imaginary* markings in a forest to keep away imaginary invisible spirits.
to transmit *culture* (the system of symbolic meanings) to others	Yes	In human societies, this process is called formal and informal *education*.

In a word, the distinguishing badge of the human species whenever it is found, is *culture*, the ability to *produce and transmit a system of meanings* that results in a certain *way of life*. As for the other abilities, indicated above, they are much more highly developed in, if not unique to, human beings.



The details of culture are not common to all human beings. Rather the possession of culture in one form or another, defines the human being. For example, *all* cultures have some form of religion, or ultimate value, but not all people are Hindus, Moslems, or Christians; nor do all people go to a church or a temple. The ultimate value may be expressed through an unusual love of work, possessions, gambling, sport, personal adornment, and so forth. Even in a so-called godless state, the views of the rulers may take a religious form. Religion is used here as an example of a cultural *trait* (characteristic), because *only* the idea of *religion* and an idea of *marriage* are common to all known cultures.

The *need* for food is, of course, common to all people. It is not, however, a cultural idea but a *drive* shared with animals. The *manner* of obtaining food is another matter—reflecting a great variety of cultural practices. Indeed all peoples have the same basic *needs*, but not the same *wants*. The needs are satisfied in different ways, thereby expressing cultural *differences*. Differences in needs are also cultural. Such differences make the world a fascinating place in which to live.

Culture is not something out there that applies to other people. Culture does not basically mean an interest in Shakespeare, love of classical music, or refined tastes a "cultured" person is supposed to have. Such tastes can be aspects of one's culture or, more precisely, of one's *subculture* (the way of life of a group within a larger culture). Teen-agers form part of a youth subculture devoted to rock music. Popular tastes may describe a *folk culture*. Minority groups in a country may have their own *ethnic* subculture. Culture is all of the above things and more. It consists of all our *learned behaviors*, as opposed to unlearned behaviors (instincts) acquired by heredity. Everything in our way of life that depends on meanings that are learned makes up *culture*. That includes *all things* (because we have learned to name them), all *ideas*, all *activities*, whether they be books, the *idea* of hunger, or eating a hamburger. All these things are *cultural inventions*; that is, they are produced by human beings and *not by nature*. Some less obvious cultural inventions are given in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8

SOME LESS OBVIOUS CULTURAL INVENTIONS

Personality	And the belief that you have one.
Self	Self is invented through interaction with others.
Politics	
Language	
Mind	Scientists do not all agree that we have a "mind." Some use the term *minding* to describe activities that seem to come from a mind.
War	
Science	
Knowledge	
Truth	What passes for truth is often a matter of agreement (consensus) among individuals in a culture.
Time	Some cultures have no language for past or future.
Work	
Privacy	This idea does not exist in some cultures.
School	

STUDENT ACTIVITY

Some Cultural Inventions and Their Origins

See if you can complete this table*

Idea Product Activity **Culture Hearth (original source)**

Example
McDonald's hamburger
The hamburger is a *cultural invention*. The *cultural hearth* (place of origin) of the Big Mac is the Eastern U.S.A. From there, it has spread (by a process of *cultural diffusion*) around the world.

1. Chair _____
2. Soap _____
3. Paper _____
4. Pajamas _____
5. Jogging _____
6. Bathroom _____
7. Verandah _____
8. Bed _____
9. Track and field sports _____
10. Shoes _____
11. Rock and roll _____
12. Milk _____
13. Jacket _____
14. Blanket _____
15. Parliament _____
16. _____
17. _____
18. _____
19. _____
20. _____

*Research Hints: Start with your dictionary; then consult broad headings in your encyclopedia, e.g., "history of clothing."

Culture and Landscape

Human beings are shaped by their *cultural environment* as well as by their *natural environment*. They use symbols to adapt to others (as part of the cultural environment) and to the physical environment that is changed by their activities to form a *cultural landscape*. North Americans are more conscious of their cultural landscape of houses, theatres, roads, parking lots, factories, and farms than they are of the physical environment on which it depends. A woman paddling up the Amazon River, however, would be dominated by the physical landscape: little else besides her canoe would distract her attention from torrential rains, jungles, stinging insects, bird calls, unusual wildlife, and so forth.

We can also think of *culture* as being a *response of a particular people to a particular physical environment*. Cultural and physical environments always *interact*. The differences in the natural elements of physical landscape: climate, vegetation, soils, and animal life and the *interaction* of these *natural elements with one another* produce an endless variety of natural *habitats* (living quarters) for humankind. Considering mountainous slopes alone, we can have slopes that are near the sea or inland; heavily forested or bare of trees; hot or cold; wet or dry; rich or poor in opportunities for hunting wildlife; rich or poor in useful minerals; subject to earthquakes or stable; volcanic or sedimentary.

Each unique combination of circumstances means a different set of *possibilities* for meeting the basic material needs of a particular people, namely the needs for food,

clothing, and shelter (see Thomas, 1982a). These different habitats compel different repsonses or *adaptations*. Thus differences in cultures over the face of the earth are inevitable. People have the same basic needs, but they will satisfy them in different ways according to the opportunities they believe are available to them in their unique cultural habitat.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND CULTURAL CLASH

A major cause of conflict

Human beings at birth are selfish and self-centred; we tend to outgrow such tendencies with maturity, but not totally. We share with animals a sense of *territory*. This sense is called the *territorial imperative*. Just as dogs bark to protect their turf, North Americans put names on their property, using the cultural device of "laws" as expressed in deeds to homes and licenses for cars. We also invent laws to guard against theft, and we invent insurance to guard against loss of or injury to what is "ours." The fences we invent to guard our turf can be real or symbolic. Our turf can also be real or symbolic. It includes our living quarters, our possessions, our friends, our status, our influence, and *our tastes, preferences, and ideas*. Thus our primitive instinct is to protect our personal ideas and ways of doing things. A different way of doing things may threaten us. Such instincts are basic to the animal side of humankind and must be outgrown through education and by contact with, and appreciation for, other people. The alternative is unnecessary conflict and bloodshed.

History is full of examples, even to the present day, of one group of people, believing that its culture is superior, trying to exterminate another group of people deemed inferior. The view that one's own culture is superior to that of other people is known as *ethnocentrism*. Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party of Germany during the 1930s and 1940s, by insisting upon such absurd ideas, triggered World War II and the deaths of countless millions of people.

Cultural Invasion

Dominant cultures have always exported and still tend to export their culture. European settlers to North America imposed their ways on the native Indian populations of the Americas after the discovery of the New World by Christopher Columbus in A.D. 1492. This dominance was obtained not by superiority of culture, but by better weapon *technology* (musket versus bow and arow). As cultures *clash*, the culture with the weaker resources and technology experiences *cultural invasion* or *cultural imperialism* even to the point of *cultural shock*.

When it came to adapting to new physical environments, the invading European culture was very often unable to cope as well as the native cultures. Early settlers starved or froze to death. They needlessly destroyed the irrigation terraces of the Incas in the Andes. They ruined forests and exterminated wildlife such as the bison and the carrier pigeon.

The lesson for us is that what works in our environment may not work in another. Even today, the *American way of life* is exported to countries where it is not suited to local conditions. Similarly, the *communism* that developed out of unique environmental and historical circumstances in Russia during the first World War, if exported to North America would not suit our conditions. For lack of understanding, the two cultural systems compete for world influence, each believing itself to be vastly superior to the other. Figure 9 gives an interesting slant on a rather unusual culture which bears further examination in a classroom situation.

Figure 9

AS OTHERS SEE US

Although we take our own cultural practices for granted, at times we find those of other peoples somewhat strange. Few peoples have customs so bewildering to outsiders as do the Naidanac and Nacirema peoples of Htron-Nacirema. One of their daily religious rituals concerns the worship of the human body. Each Naidanac hut contains a shrine for this purpose. In the shrine are mirrors for admiring the body. Built into the wall of the shrine is also a chest containing charms and magical potions, some of which are fragrant, for driving away all evil spirits of ugliness and disease. Many of the magic potions are obtained with the help of a medicine man, who writes down the names of helpful spirits on papyrus. The papyrus is then presented with a gift to another medicine man, who will prepare the magic potions.

Every group of medicine men has a special witch-doctor known as a "listener" who has the power of driving out the demons that live in the heads of people who have been betwitched.

Much of the Naidanac social life centres on the care and feeding of the *rac*—a beast of burden similar to the bull in size and strength. Some members of the tribe own herds of racs. The size of the herd is a measure of power and prestige. Young men may spend much time washing racs, with the hope of borrowing them for their courting rituals.

If all of the foregoing seems weird, then try spelling *Naidanac*, *Htron-Nacirema* and *rac* backward. This will give you an idea of how we must appear to other peoples.

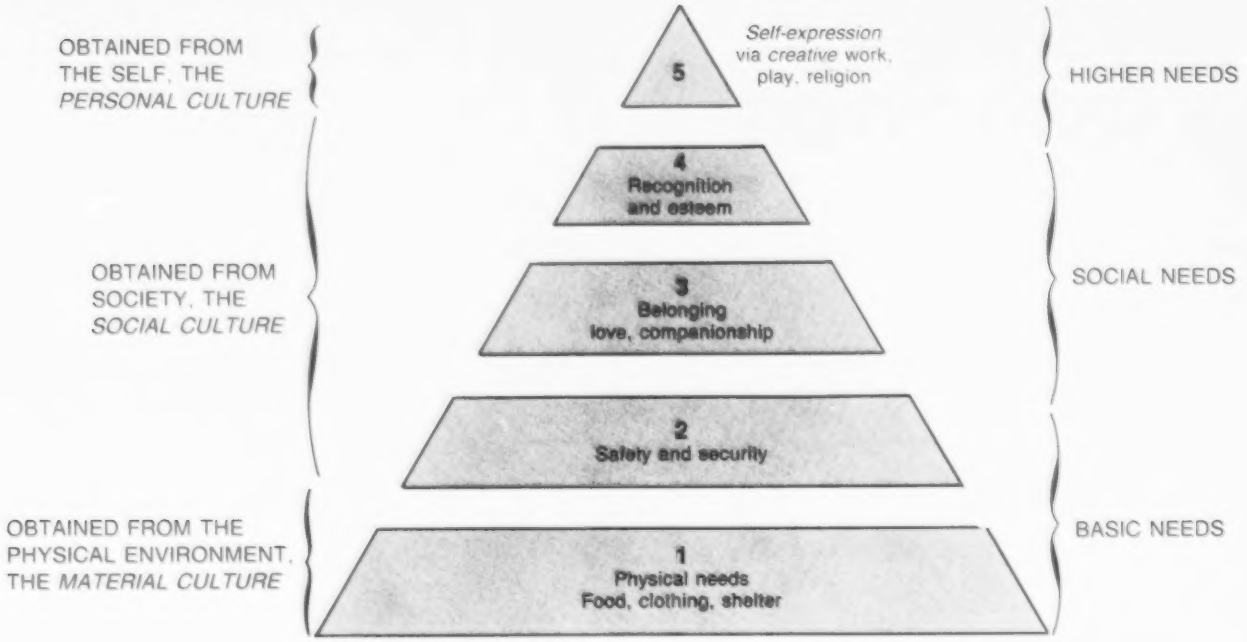
HUMAN NEEDS IN RELATION TO CULTURAL AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Nature of Needs

Human beings everywhere have the same pattern of needs, but they meet their needs differently, because of differences in culture, differences in environmental possibilities, and differences of individual personality. Human needs fall into a pyramid of five levels as can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10

PYRAMID OF HUMAN NEEDS



Source: After Maslow and others

This diagram summarizes principles that have been proven by Western science within the last 25 years. In the pyramid, each layer supports the layers above it. Generally speaking, only when the needs in the lower levels have been met is it possible to satisfy the higher ones.

Thus, a person who is starving does not seek out companions or practise acrobatics. The physical needs of food, clothing, and shelter are obtained from *resources* in the physical environment. If the resources are unavailable in the local environment, they are obtained from someone else's environment by *trade* in peaceful times or by *force* as has happened throughout much of humankind's sorry warlike history. *Security* includes protection against such hazards in the physical environment as flood, rain, cold, drought, and wild animals or such hazards in the cultural environment as thieves, personal enemies, or "intruders" from other cultures. This basic security-need usually involves a degree of help from others by way of *social organization* as in the case (in our culture) of police, firefighters, and ambulance attendants.

When basic needs are met and taken for granted, mid-level needs assert themselves. In all cultures, because human beings are *social animals*, they need companionship, belonging to a group, and being regarded by a special person. They need to have their uniqueness valued and recognized by others. Only when other people value us do we value ourselves; then we can share our unique qualities and talents through *self-expression* for the benefit of others. These ways can be art, music, literature, sports, religion, public works, drama, dancing, and every manner of creative expression that one can think of. *These impulses exist in all cultures.*

THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING HUMAN NEEDS AND THE MEANS OF MEETING THEM

The Effects of Denial

Denial of basic needs leads to ill health and then to *death*. Denial of social needs may produce *antisocial behavior*. Denial of higher needs, if the other needs have been satisfied, produces feelings of personal *unhappiness*.

A starving person may attempt to steal the necessary resources from others. A culture that lacks essential resources may wage *war* on other cultures if such resources cannot be obtained by peaceful means.

Persons who bully others may be trying to obtain recognition to satisfy their need for esteem. They need to learn to satisfy their needs in useful ways. One culture may bully another for similar reasons. People ruled by *dictators* may have their higher needs frustrated and take their problems out on other cultures, sincerely, but mistakenly, believing that their way is better. For example, freedom of speech and artistic self-expression were banned in Hitler's Germany in the 1930s. Foreign books were burned. Nazi soldiers invading other countries destroyed the cultural symbols of the people living there. It is thought that Germany was making up for her *feelings of inferiority*, as a result of losing in World War I, by denying other people the right of self-expression.

Spiritual Needs and Religion

The very highest needs are sometimes called *spiritual*. These indicate the need of the individual to make sense of his/her existence, to find meaning in a bewildering universe, and to seek answers to such unanswerable questions as "Why is there a universe? Why do I exist? Will my family and friends continue to exist in some form after death? Do spirits watch over us? Can we talk to them? What do we have to do to keep on their good side?"

Religion is the set of organized cultural beliefs and practices that try to answer such questions. *Spiritual* refers more to the concern, and the urge to know and do, than to the specific answers themselves. The questions that can be asked are shaped by the language of the culture. Religious forms are themselves aspects of culture, and they differ from one culture to another.

Religious Intolerance and War

Sorry to say, people throughout recorded history have killed one another over differences in religion, over the differences in the answers to the same basic questions, and sometimes in the name of the same loving God! Strange to say, people quarrel not over what is known, but over what is unknown. No reasonable person would argue over whether or not grass is green—but the *invisible* is another matter. Science does not provide answers, because science is concerned with What? and How? questions rather than Why?

Sometimes religions have been used as *masks* to disguise the *greed* for resources or power that is the real reason for a war. For example, in the Middle Ages, Christians fought Moslems in a holy war over the holy city of Jerusalem. The real reason for the war was the desire of certain Christian rulers to control trade in the Mediterranean Ocean south of Europe, by kicking out their Moslem rivals.

The Need for Tolerance of Differences

Today, with improved transportation and communications, the various cultures on this planet are coming into contact as never before. We are becoming a *global village*, and we may yet have a single dominant planetary culture. Although a more uniform culture may reduce conflict over differences, a single religion for all individuals is undesirable. Life would be too boring if we all believed the same things. The relation between *spiritual* and *religion* is like that between an *ocean* and a *container* for holding water such as a cup, a bucket, a bottle, or a glass. Although everyone needs water, no container made by human hands can hold an ocean of unfathomable spiritual reality. More important, does it really matter out of what kind of container one drinks water, so long as one's thirst is quenched?

Freedom and Limits

Freedom consists only in *choice* from a limited number of possibilities. Limits are imposed by the physical environment, the culture or way of life of the society that one lives in, and one's personal make-up and preferences.

Human beings believe that they are free in their thoughts and feelings, but they are usually *unaware of how they came by their thoughts and feelings*, which control their speech and action. Indeed, our very thoughts and feelings are shaped or *conditioned* by our physical and cultural environments. The term *brainwashed* is sometimes used to describe the conditioning of people or cultures that we may not appreciate. However, we should realize that other people, from their point of view, may see our own conditioning as brainwashing.

The effect of nature on the human being is much greater than is generally realized. Humankind is not apart from nature but a *part of nature* and is therefore not free to break natural laws or exceed the limitations imposed by nature.

The normal person is not free to give up eating forever. A person is not free to jump off a tall building, flap unaided arms, and fly. One is not free to violate the law of gravity—only to demonstrate it.

Environmental Determinism and Choice

People are not subject to the law of *determinism*, a view once held by scientists that nature determines what people do.

Nature determines the elements of the environment: landscape, climate, soils, and what life-forms, other than humans, may do.

Plants have no choices. Behavior of animals is also determined by nature, for animal adaptation is *instinctive*. Human beings are unique in that very little of their behavior is instinctive. Almost all of it is learned through *culture*. Whereas evolution in the animal kingdom is physical and determined by nature, the evolution, or progress, of the human species is not so determined. Only humankind has the capacity to shape its own progress by changing its culture rather than its *genes*. The upper layers of the pyramid of needs (see Figure 10) are uniquely human, and make possible the freedom of choice that influences, the *way* the lower levels of needs will be met.

The *number* of choices available to people varies from region to region. The political system of a country influences the kinds and number of choices that can be made, because *politics* is the *business of making choices within a society as a whole*. Individuals who can make their own choices are said to have *political freedom*. In some countries, governments make basic choices for people and decide where they may live, what they may do, what they may say, to whom they can speak, and so forth.

Possibilism is the view that nature may *influence* but does *not* determine the ways humans may use the environment, as the determinists argued during the first half of the 20th century. Instead, nature provides a range of *possibilities* from which people may choose. The choices actually made are shaped by culture and personal preference within that culture.

This idea is an important one, and some examples will make it clear. In the 1930s and 1940s, Adolf Hitler and his Nazis invaded most of Europe, claiming that environmental necessity (determinism) forced them to do so. Today, no educated person believes that nature causes war. However, if enough people *believe* that nature determines war, wars will be hard to prevent.

The North American environment provides countless possibilities for food, very few of which are chosen. For example, there is no natural reason why you and I could not eat grasshoppers or rats. Some Japanese eat grasshoppers. Some Africans eat rats. Until recent times, many groups of people in the world practised *cannibalism*, the eating of human flesh. Clearly, grasshoppers, rats, and human flesh are not used for food in our culture. Nature does not tell one to eat hamburgers or fish or pizza. Culture limits the number of foods that will be available, but personal preference and means make the final selection. We can say similar things about clothing and shelter. Nature does not say Canadians should not wear grass skirts. Some cultures do use grass skirts.

Of various choices that can be made, some are better adaptations to nature than others. Some foods are more plentiful, more nutritious, and cheaper than others. Some fabrics do the job better than others. One does not have to insulate a house, but one is more comfortable if one does. A house built on stilts in the Amazon is not damaged by floods.

The study of other cultures shows us what others' experiences have taught them about the best ways to adapt to their environment, and also, perhaps, about mistakes to avoid. Good ideas travel around the world. By such *culture transfer*, we can apply in our own country the lessons learned from other peoples. By such mutual education, human progress occurs. For such reasons, world cultures are worthy of our interest and attention.

Differences in Possibilities

From the foregoing discussion, we can see that a large part of culture is simply the set of choices that people use for responding to the environment. We have seen that since there are differences in environment around the world, differences in cultural adaptation will always arise. We see that nature influences human activity not by determining it directly, but by determining the number of choices available for meeting the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter.

Different environments differ in the number of choices available to human beings in terms of food, means of overcoming obstacles to survival, and opportunities for a comfortable existence. Different environments usually have different *resources*. A resource is really anything that humans can use, but it is not a resource unless people know of its existence and know that it can be used. For example, uranium has always existed, but only since World War II have some cultures realized that it can be used for nuclear power. The ability to use resources also depends on the *technology* a culture has. Technology is simply the *tools* and *know-how* available for dealing with the environment. The technology for developing nuclear power did not exist prior to this cen-

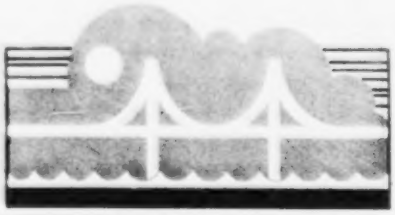
tury. Thus the actual possibilities that can be used in an environment are influenced by *cultural perception* of what the resources are, the technology that exists, and the choices that the culture prefers to make.

Interdependence

To meet their needs, individuals need their local environment, they need one another, they also need the people of a different culture living in distant environments to provide resources and tools not available locally. For example, Canadians export fish, newsprint, and minerals to buy bananas from environments within Latin America or to buy electronic technology from Japan.

The different habitats of the earth are not equally favorable for human life and prosperity. Resources are not to be found equally everywhere. Those with surplus resources can trade with other cultures to obtain scarce resources, tools, or services. Habitats change as people find new ways of using them. Thus ideals as well as materials are traded and spread. This spreading process is called *cultural diffusion*.

Perhaps a future global culture will have to overcome environmental inequalities by sharing resources so as to prevent war. There is a lesson to be learned from the Kwakiutl Indians of Western Canada, who overcame their enemies by showering them with gifts during *potlatch* ceremonies, until they surrendered.



CULTURE AND PLACE IN A NUTSHELL

A cultural region is primarily created by humans rather than by nature. In social studies, the term *culture* does not have to do with music, art, and the appreciation of Shakespeare. Instead it simply means *way of life*. A *cultural landscape* has been modified by the presence of humans. Elements of a cultural landscape include fields cleared of trees, farms, roads, buildings, parks, pasture-land, and so forth.

Although a cultural landscape is defined from the standpoint of human impact on the environment, it *is never independent of the natural environment*. Rather it reflects the way a group of people has *chosen* to use the natural environment. This use may be a well-adapted one, in which case, a group of people will live harmoniously with its surroundings. An ill-adapted use injures the ability of the environment to continue supporting human life. Different environments offer a different range of use possibilities for sustaining life. The pattern of use, that is followed, in any given area, is determined not by nature, but by the customs of people that reflect both their culture (way of life) and the personal tastes that are permissible within their culture.

Humans' use of an environment usually requires some combination of tools, labor, and social organization. A fancy term for the tools a culture has available to it for coping with its enviroment is *technology*. This term can be used whether the tools are simple or complicated, cheap or expensive, individually operated or team operated. Social organization occurs not only so people can manage the environment but also so people can manage one another, divide the work, reduce conflict as to whose decision will prevail, organize time so as to allow for play, story-telling, social get-togethers, and ceremonies. If different groups of people, or cultures, come into conflict with one another, then technology and social organization are likely to be used as *weapons*.

REVIEWING WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Terms for Review and Discussion

Adaptation
Address
Barter
Basic needs
Conditioning
Cultural
—clash
—conflict
—diffusion
—environment
—exchange
—export
—hearth
—imperialism
—invasion
—invention
—landscape
—material
—perception
—personal
—realm
—region
—shock
—social
—stress
—trait
—world
Culture
Determinism
—drive
Environment
—cultural
—natural
Ethnocentrism
Factor
Folk-culture
Geographic region
Global Village
Habitat
Higher needs
Humus
Interaction
Interdependence
Intolerance
Leaching
Minding
Multi-factor region
Natural region
Political region
Politics
Possibilism
Region
Religion
Resource
Security
Single-factor region
Social organization
Society
Soil
Spiritual needs
Subculture
Symbol
Technology
Territorial imperative
Value
Weathering
Zone of transition

CHECKING YOUR UNDERSTANDING

1. Why do different cultures exist in the world?
2. Why do differences exist within a national culture (the Canadian culture, for example)?
3. If other people have a culture different from our own, is it necessarily better or worse than our own?
4. Why must we understand other cultures?
5. Would other cultures use our environment as we do? Explain.
6. What is the difference between *needs* and *wants*?
   a. Which is determined by:
      1) nature?
      2) culture?
   b. Which is more likely to divide people? Why?
   c. Is it possible for wants in one culture to become the needs of another? Explain.
7. If ways of adapting to an environment are learned, can *undesirable* ways of doing so be *unlearned*? Give some examples.
8. Do high living standards always meet the needs of a culture? Explain.
9. Why do you suppose cultures change over time? Why don't they all change at the same rate?
10. List what you consider to be the major causes of war.
11. If you had the power to ensure global peace, what steps whould you take?

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